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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes state regulations for the training of child care staff members in developmentally appropriate safe aquatic practices, outlines required features of any pools that children visit, and suggests safe practices for water-related activities at child care centers and swimming pools. The staff training regulation suggestions include requirements for on-duty lifeguards, for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training for lifeguards and staff members, and for staff members to know first aid, water safety rules, how to swim, all pool regulations, and other provisions. Pools should be surrounded by a fence, have self-locking gates, have emergency telephone numbers and first aid kits available, have filtration systems, have annual inspection by the local Department of Health, be located away from play areas, have daily chemical checks, and have water temperature at least at 70 degrees. For water activities on site at child care centers, equipment should be cleaned daily and emptied and put away when not in use, staff should have CPR water safety training, and a staff-to-child ratio of one-to-two should be maintained. (JB)

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FOCUS ON PRESCHOOL AQUATICS: CHILD CARE REGULATIONS

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It feels warm; it feels good; it feel squishy; it feels soft; it feels blue; it feels like 100 dogs; these are descriptors which children use to describe water. Water is a wonderful environment for children. It stimulates children to broaden their outlook and to engage in problem solving. It excites the senses of the children, and it heightens their awareness. Children should be exposed to various water environments from an early age. Ensuring this should be the responsibility of the child's primary caregiver.

The face of caregivers is changing in the United States due to the diversification of the role of women in the work force. In 1993 57.9 percent of mothers with children under the age of six were in the labor force (State of America's Children Yearbook, 1994). This means that over half of mothers are working and willp depend upon others to care for their children for part or all of the day. More than 6.5 million children younger than five who had mothers who were employed were cared for by someone other than a parent in 1990 (State of America's Children Yearbook, 1994). The question now becomes, who is caring for United States children? According to the State of America's Children Yearbook (1994) 64.5 percent of the children were cared for in child care homes and child care centers. This amounts to approximately 4.2 million children. The remaining children are cared for by relatives, 25.1 percent, unrelated care giver in child's home, 5.1 percent, and 5.1 percent are involved in other care (Children's Defense Fund, 1994). The result is that children at a very early age are spending large amounts of time each day in a group setting

The regulations for these group settings vary from state to state. An area of concern for group child care settings is the amount of preservice training for the staff members. According to the State of America's Children Yearbook 1994 more than two-thirds, of the states fail to require preservice training for child care center teachers. The number, 29 states, is less for family child care providers. This is alarming information considering the fact that there is a well

established link between staff training and the quality of child care services.

Staff members are involved in modeling behavior, providing a safe and nurturing environment for children, and designing and enacting developmentally appropriate curriculum practices. One curriculum area which is common to child care centers is water play. Children are encouraged to engage in aquatic activities by staff members who may posses limited training in the safe use of this environment. Thirty states have some type of regulations for child care centers. The depth and stringency of these regulations vary from one state to another. There is a strong need to develop regulations for all states regulating water play. Regulations should be designed in the areas of staff supervision, pools, and water tables, portable pools, and water buckets.

Child care centers arrange pool visits to expose the children to water activities. There is the assumption by the child care staff that the pool is safe and that the staff can surrender their authority. This may be a dangerous assumption. The staff may not be trained in safety procedures and what to look for to ensure that a save environment is provided for the children. State regulations which require staff members to be trained in Developmentally Appropriate Safe Aquatic Practices (DASAP) should include the following:

* Lifeguard on duty whenever the children are in the pool area

* Lifeguard should be trained in Adult and Infant/Toddler cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

* Staff members on duty should be trained in Adult and Infant/Toddler CPR

* Staff members should be trained in first aid

* Staff members should be trained in water safety through a safety video

* Staff members should be capable of swimming

* Staff members should make themselves familiar with all pool regulations

* All parts and depths areas of the pool must be visible

* Adults present must know how to turn off the pump and filtering system

* Staff to child ratios should follow the these formulas
  one-to-one for children who cannot swim
  one-to-two for children who can swim

* Driver and transportation should be available at all times

* Emergency information for each child available

* First aid kit available

Staff members should make sure that the pool which they are visiting have the following features:

* Outdoor pools surrounded by a fence a minimum of four feet high

* Self-Locking gates

* Emergency phone and numbers clearly visible

* First aid kit

* Rescue equipment

* Pool filtration system

* Pool inspected annually by the Department of Health

* Pool located away from play area

* Chlorine and PH tested daily and recorded

* Water temperature no less than 78 degrees

While these suggested regulations may seem standard for individuals involved in water safety this is not the case for many child care workers. Training is limited for child care workers in all areas but particularity in the area of water safety. Regulations would force centers to provide in service training for child care workers to assist them in developing a knowledge base in pool safety and to be discriminate when selecting pool sites for water activities. Furthermore, child care workers should be aware that lakes and streams are not an acceptable recreation site for children. In these settings it is to difficult to provide an experience which is safe, hygienically and physically.

Another area of water play which needs regulation that may be more hazardous than large pool play is the use of portable pools, water tables and water buckets. Daily children in child care centers are introduced the wonderful world of water through curriculum activities involving water tables and water buckets. Both can be dangerous for young children, as well as portable pools which are popular on hot days. This type of equipment seems relatively harmless, but drownings or disease can occur if the following precautions are not taken:

* Equipment must be cleaned daily

* Equipment must be emptied when not in use

* A staff- to-child ration of one-to-two should be maintained

* Staff members should be trained in first aid and adult and Infant/Toddler CPR

* Staff members trained by video in water safety

* Equipment must be removed from play area when not in use

* Equipment should be in a locked area separated from the child care rooms when not in use

Child care workers must be made aware of the dangers of drowning of children who are involved in the seeming simplest of water play. Only constant supervision can prevent the 300 drowning deaths each year of children under age five (National Swimming Pool Safety Committee, PTA Today, 1993). Regulations and education are necessary to protect children in child care centers by providing Developmentally Appropriate Safe Aquatic Practices.

References

National Swimming Pool Safety Committee. (1993, April). Pool Safety: A Few Simple Rules. PTA, p.16.

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